Report from the

Committee on Access to Employment and Lifelong Learning

TO THE
PRESIDENTIAL
TASK FORCE
ON EMPLOYMENT
OF ADULTS WITH
DISABILITIES

Co-Chairs:

Alexis M. Herman, Secretary
Department of Labor

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Employment and Training Administration
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TASK FORCE ON
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To: Alexis M. Herman, Secretary of Labor
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with Disabilities
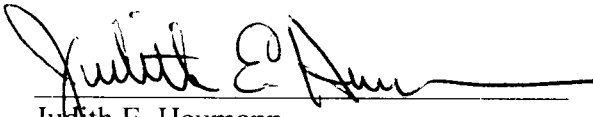Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities

From: Judith E. Heumann, Assistant Secretary
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
Department of Education

Ray Uhalde, Deputy Assistant Secretary
Employment and Training Administration
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Under cover of this memorandum, we transmit the 1999 report to the President from the Committee on Access to Employment and Lifelong Learning. We understand that this report will be made available concurrent to publication of the full Task Force report in December.

The report contains a summary of current and planned activities and was drafted with the assistance of Committee members. It addresses eight broad themes. These themes include: workforce development, equity/under served populations, systems integration, private sector initiatives, technology, database technologies, tax policy, and lifelong learning.

We approve this report as written and submit it to you for publication and public use.

Judith E. Heumann   Ray Uhalde

Put Ability to Work!

Mission

The Committee on Access to Employment and Lifelong Learning (the Committee) is co-chaired by Department of Labor Secretary Alexis M. Herman and Department of Education Secretary Richard Riley. Ray Uhalde, Labor's Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Employment and Training Administration, and Judith Heumann, Education's Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, serve as Chair Designees.

The mission of the Committee was established in *Re-Charting the Course: The First Report of the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities as follows. The Committee shall:*

1. Analyze the existing programs and policies of Task Force member agencies to determine what changes, modifications, and innovations may be necessary to remove barriers to work faced by people with disabilities.

2. Examine and make recommendations relating to lifelong learning programs not created specifically to serve the needs of adults with disabilities, and their openness and accessibility to adults with disabilities and the outcomes they effect for adults with disabilities participation in the workforce. Further, examine whether these programs have an appropriate customer focus for adults with disabilities.

3. Analyze and make recommendations relating to youth programs designed to place individuals in private sector employment, and the outcomes of those programs for young people with disabilities in completing school, developing job specific skills, achieving gainful employment, and avoiding incarceration.

4. Examine and make recommendations relating to lifelong learning programs created specifically to serve the needs of youth and/or adults with disabilities and the effect on the ability and willingness of people with disabilities to participate in the workforce.

5. Examine and make recommendations relating to the integration and coordination of lifelong learning programs that serve adults with disabilities into the broader education and workforce development systems.

6. Evaluate and, where appropriate, coordinate and collaborate on, research and demonstration priorities of Task Force member agencies related to employment of adults with disabilities. Program areas for focus of these committee activities may include, but are not limited to One-Stops, Welfare-to-Work, School-to-Work and youth programs related to employment, Vocational Rehabilitation, State Mental Health and Mental Retardation Systems, Ticket to Independence, and Plans for Achieving Self-Support.

7. Examine and make recommendations relating to statistically valid measures of the employment of adults with disabilities throughout the economy.

8. Examine and make recommendations relating to the availability, cost, and use of assistive technology in the employment of adults with disabilities.

9. Examine and make recommendations relating to the accessibility of technologies and the national and international infrastructure to working adults with disabilities.

10. Review and take appropriate action on the reports and recommendations arising out of the Task Force's work to fulfill the mandate contained in Section 2(b) and 2(f) of the Executive Order.

Background

Overview

The scope of the Committee is very broad. In an effort to begin immediately addressing the barriers that exist for adults with disabilities in their attempt to attain or retain meaningful employment, this

Committee established four working groups — Employment Barriers, Access to Technology, Tax Policy and Lifelong Learning — to address a list of discreet items that members agreed were readily achievable. Each of the issues identified were broken down into short term and long term goals. Many of the short term goals have been accomplished or are currently in process. Strategies to address the long term goals are in place. The efforts and issues of the Committee's cross-cutting Subcommittee on Expanding Opportunities for Young People with Disabilities are contained in a separate report.

One of the ways to formulate a vision for increasing access to employment and lifelong learning for people with disabilities is to seek answers that fit within the new systems created by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The WIA, which also contains the Rehabilitation Act reauthorization, lays out a nearly seamless system of access to various programs and services for individuals seeking employment. These services can include access to One-Stop Career Centers, vocational rehabilitation (VR), vocational and adult education, and other services and supports as appropriate. WIA implementation is in its infancy, but there are already concerns being raised regarding the ability of generic workforce development systems to provide the specialized training, supports, and other services needed by individuals with disabilities. VR is the only Federal program specifically designed to facilitate the provision of such services and supports for individuals with disabilities and is a key partner to improving service to individuals with disabilities through the One-Stop Career Centers. In addition to WIA, the reforms made to the nation's welfare system also need to more uniformly reflect the impact that disability can have on families that receive assistance. The challenge the Task Force faces is how to ensure that WIA and welfare reform are implemented to effectively address the needs of individuals with disabilities and to complement policy changes regarding income supports, health care, transportation, personal assistance and so on.

While access to employment is certainly one goal of workforce development policies and is also the work of this Committee, policy related to school-to-

work transitioning, post-secondary education, and other training of youth and adults cannot be overlooked. Without adequate skills to compete in the modern economy, even if physical and other barriers are eliminated, persons with disabilities will qualify for low-end, entry-level employment. To begin examining this issue, the Committee's workgroup on Lifelong Learning is looking at the extent to which generic lifelong learning programs produce outcomes that affect adults with disabilities. The Subcommittee on Expanding Employment Opportunities for Young People with Disabilities has been addressing issues related to basic education and transition from school to work and will issue a separate report to the Task Force.

The Committee is beginning to examine Federal and State tax policies to assess their effect on the employment status of individuals with disabilities. Through gathering and disseminating information regarding current tax policies and examining the effect of tax subsidies on providing workplace assistance, this Committee hopes to make recommendations for changes to the tax code.

In addition to the issues raised specific to this Committee, this report presents additional recommendations with regard to technology. Technology is one of the issues that cuts across the work of many committees. In keeping with its mission, the Committee's recommendations address the Information Technology (IT) sector of the economy as employers, as well as the need for effective use of technology to improve individuals with disabilities' access to employment.

As the WIA and welfare reform continue implementation and coordinate with school-to-work transition and adult education and training programs, this Committee will build on its current success, speaking with various stakeholders, including groups currently regarded as underserved, such as Native Americans, to understand existing barriers more fully. In addition, we will move from an identification and information-sharing mode into one of barrier removal.

Priority Areas of Committee Interest

The following have been identified as priority areas for initial activity by the Committee's work groups. Issues and recommendations for further activity are included in this report.

- **Workforce Development/Workforce Investment Act and Welfare-to-Work** — Availability and accessibility of work-related services, including skill acquisition and development programs for individuals with disabilities, training for staff of such programs regarding the unique needs of individuals with disabilities, collaboration between all workforce development actors to assure access to jobs for individuals with disabilities, and investment on the part of the Federal government to support and extend current efforts and to develop new programs.

- **Equity/Underserved Populations** — Focusing research and outreach efforts to underserved populations in an effort to ensure that services are provided in a way that respects cultural differences and ethnic diversity.

- **Systems Integration** — The Barriers work group initiated an interagency collaboration between Social Security Administration (SSA), Department of Labor (DOL), Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and other agencies by hosting a symposium on *Overcoming Barriers to Employment: Implications for Federal Policies and Programs* on September 22, 1999. The Task Force is preparing a comprehensive report that will synthesize the identified barriers, innovative strategies, and policy recommendations. Agencies involved in the sharing of effective practices and program collaboration anticipate the continuation of these activities throughout the life of the Task Force and beyond.

- **Private Sector Initiative** — Efforts to conduct a hiring incentive program for employers that would be on the order of the President's welfare-to-work efforts.

- **Technology** — Addressing access to assistive technology and the "digital divide" that exists for individuals with disabilities as they attempt to use technology as educational, job search, or workplace tools, and improved access to the employment opportunities present in the field of information technology.

- **Database Technologies** — Consolidating, streamlining, and improving access to databases that showcase the skills and talents of job-ready individuals with disabilities seeking employment, such as those managed by the Social Security Administration, the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, and the Department of Labor.

- **Tax Policy** — Greater understanding and use of the tax code as a tool to improve employment access of individuals with disabilities through public education, review of current tax law, and recommendations to alter tax law.

- **Lifelong Learning** — Examining the extent to which generic and disability-specific lifelong learning programs produce positive outcomes that affect adults with disabilities and identifying strategies for the integration and coordination of these programs across Federal agencies.

Issues and Recommendations

Workforce Development: Workforce Investment Act and Welfare to Work

Issue: Workforce Investment Act

It is critically important that the potential of the One-Stop Career Center system be realized in full for people with disabilities, as it will likely be the focal point for workforce services during the early decades of the 21st Century.

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) reforms Federal job training programs and creates a new, comprehensive workforce investment system at the State and local level. A primary objective of the WIA is to streamline services by better integration of program delivery through a One-Stop Career Center system. Many more programs will be co-located and coordinated to provide cohesive services to individuals and businesses alike. The major restructuring of the workforce delivery system envisioned under WIA partners numerous Federal programs, including adult literacy, welfare-to-work and vocational rehabilitation programs, and represents significant devolution of authority from Federal to State and local areas. This landmark legislation poses many opportunities to address the concerns of the disability community. At the same time, the WIA presents considerable challenges to the workforce system as a whole, and for people with disabilities in particular.

Recommendations

1. In recognition of the significant need for technical assistance to State and local workforce systems, a number of efforts are being pursued to facilitate implementation from both systemic policy and individual client perspectives:

   * A number of technical assistance tools and videos are being produced by the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) and the Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). A video on universal technologies has been issued to the workforce system which is primarily devoted to assistive technologies for people with disabilities, and a more comprehensive disability-focused video is in development. RSA and ETA have also coordinated on the development of training videos for local staff on the WIA.

   * A *One-Stop Guide to Access* will be issued in the fall of 1999. As part of WIA requirements to provide training on disability issues to workforce staff, ETA and RSA are jointly planning an expanded regional technical assistance effort directed at training State and local workforce staff about compliance issues and customer services for individuals with disabilities.

2. ETA and RSA continue to closely coordinate and collaborate at the national and regional levels to address regulatory and policy guidelines as WIA is implemented. Regional contacts have been identified in each agency to focus on addressing services to people with disabilities through One-Stop Career Centers with an initial meeting held in February 1999. Activities are ongoing in each region involving joint conferences, implementing training on disability issues, resolving State and local implementation issues, and other collaborative efforts. The Committee will continue to make recommendations concerning the removal of barriers for people with disabilities.

3. RSA, ETA, the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) are continuing joint funding of systems-change and partnership grants in a number of states. A number of these demonstration projects are focused on innovative collaborations related to employment and training in the new workforce environment and expanding partnerships across disability service providers which go beyond current required partnerships under the WIA, and will provide valuable information relative to the potential and obstacles of these program designs.

4. There is a significant need for addressing cost-sharing, cost-leveraging, and integrated funding models related to program services for people with disabilities under the WIA, particularly relative to using vocational rehabilitation versus adult, dislocated, and youth resources. An important objective of the Task Force will be to identify successful "Memorandums of Understanding" and other processes that facilitate multiple funding schemes to address the multiple barriers commonly faced by people with disabilities and the variety of programs for which they are frequently eligible.

5. Interim final regulations on WIA's non-discrimination provisions will be issued in the fall of 1999. The Committee will review, provide comments on, and work closely with the Department of Labor (DOL) on policy decisions relative to people with disabilities and services under the new workforce delivery system.

6. DOL is requesting $50 million in discretionary funds for the FY 2000 and 2001 budgets for a Work Incentives Grant program to assist individuals with disabilities by improving access to information, benefits, and services through the One-Stop Careeer Centers. Passage of the proposed Work Incentives Improvement Act legislation includes $23 million for benefits counseling, while $27 million is requested to support enhancements to services for people with disabilities in the One-Stop Career Centers. This latter grant program would provide considerable impetus to States to enhance services to people with disabilities and expand networking capabilities across additional Federal, State and local programs. This would include SSA, Health and Human Service (HHS), and SAMHSA programs that are not currently under the One-Stop "umbrella" and, therefore, have less connection to the labor market information and networking infrastructure.

7. The Department of Education has funded Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers that are evaluating workforce development changes from a policy and implementation perspective relative to people with disabilities. In addition, the WIA interim final regulations called for an evaluation of the One-Stop Career Center system and services for people with disabilities.

Issue: Welfare-to-Work

While States have always had to address the issue of disability in the welfare population, the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 has made this a much more pressing concern for States. The new work requirements and lifetime limit on assistance have important implications for two broad groups of individuals with disabilities: recipients who have some type of physical or mental disability that either limits their ability to work or creates barriers to their working, and members of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) families with disabilities (such as dependent children, chronically ill spouses, or frail elders) whose primary caregiver is a TANF recipient who is now expected to work and is subject to the five year time limit on welfare receipt. The primary challenge, therefore, is to remove the employment barriers and disincentives to work that currently exist for TANF recipients with disabilities (and caregivers), and to replace these with an environment that promotes equal employment opportunity and economic self-sufficiency.

Recommendations

1. The Committee will examine data related to TANF recipients who are parents of children with disabilities and formulate recommendations that would target resources for this population. Currently this information is not being collected through the standard reporting mechanisms.

2. The Committee will examine potential mechanisms for data collection by the Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services regarding these two populations: recipients with disabilities and those who are family members of children with disabilities.

3. Resources should be designed to assist families in securing appropriate services in order to assist them in transitioning off of public assis-

tance. The emphasis could be on both short- and long-term supports.

4. The Committee will examine the results from the May 1999 "Welfare-to-Work, TANF, and Disabilities Work Group Meeting" and formulate recommendations for system building and policy development.

5. RSA and the DOL Office of Welfare-to-Work are in the process of developing a joint education effort to introduce vocational rehabilitation programs and welfare-to-work grantees and to encourage collaboration between the two.

Equity/Underserved Populations

Issue: Native American Initiatives

Approximately two million American Indians and Alaska Natives live in remote rural areas of the United States. There are more than 557 tribes, who speak more than 250 languages. Many Native Americans face significant obstacles such as lack of transportation across vast distances, excessively high unemployment, and lack of services. Conditions on many reservations are bleak—homes heated by wood stoves, no electricity, poor or non-existent roads, and potable water found many miles away from home. Such problems are compounded when a person facing them lives with a disability. A reported 26 percent, more than 490,000 Native Americans, live with a significant disability.

There are many cultural and political barriers to developing and delivering programs and services for tribal members. As a result, Native Americans with disabilities have frequently been left without the information, supports, services, and legal protections they need and deserve. Issues affecting American Indians with disabilities include: tribal sovereignty; integration into tribal life; housing; employment; health care; access to personal assistance and community-based long-term care; transportation; and assistive technology.

Congress recognized the high incidence of disability in the American Indian community in the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1998. In addition, in his recent tour of the nation's most impoverished areas, President Clinton visited the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and discussed increasing government aid for the basic needs of this population.

Recognizing Tribal sovereignty, the Task Force has established formal procedures for consulting with, and obtaining input from, the American Indian community, including the National Congress of American Indians, National Indian Health Board, and the United South and Eastern Tribes. The Task Force will establish culturally appropriate methods to solicit input and formal consultation with the American Indians.

Recommendations

1. Direct the Secretary of the Interior to designate the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a full member of the Task Force and direct the Secretary of HHS to designate the Director of Indian Health Service as a full member of the Task Force.

2. Direct the Secretary of Education to develop and establish a priority to fund an American Indian Disability Technical Assistance Center to assist the 557 Federally recognized American Indian tribes and Alaska Native Villages to examine the implication of, and potential for adoption of, culturally appropriate laws, policies, and programs to assist their members with disabilities in living healthy, productive, and integrated lives within their communities. This Center would provide technical assistance to Tribes across a number of different disciplines and service delivery mechanisms.

3. Direct the Department of Education to develop and modify the discretionary grant formula for American Indian Rehabilitation under Section 121 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended to ensure adequate Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Native Americans with disabilities. The formula used to fund the Independent Living Centers may serve as a model.

4. Direct the appropriate Task Force members to develop and design surveys, data analysis, and research to better inform the Task Force and the Administration on employment-related issues in the American Indian disability population.

Systems Integration

Issue: State Systems Change

One of the short-term projects from the Barriers Work Group was to conduct an interagency examination of projects and practices that focus on employment barriers and improved employment outcomes for adults with disabilities. The Task Force, in collaboration with SSA, DOL, SAMHSA, and RSA, hosted a meeting on September 22, 1999, to bring together grantee States and organizations involved in significant model practices related to systems change. The meeting focused on identifying barriers to employment, successful practices or what has failed, and what further needs to be accomplished. The information learned and shared at this meeting will be used by the Committee for policy development and for identifying areas of further research to be pursued.

Recommendations

1. The Barriers Work Group will examine the recommendations generated by the State Systems Change meeting for Committee action.

2. The Task Force should identify a contractor to conduct a survey across Federal agencies of grant programs in order to identify duplication in subject matter, best-practices that would be beneficial to share, and gaps where scarce grant resources could be utilized in the future.

3. The above noted contract would include an evaluation of Welfare to Work discretionary grants involving services to people with disabilities to leverage experiences and best practices emerging from these grant programs to the broader disability population.

4. The Committee should look to identifying methodologies or procedures for identifying

"best practices" in grant programs, how best to share or leverage "best practices" across Federal agencies and programs, and the most effective means of widely disseminating this information to organizations and consumers.

Private Sector Initiative

Issue: Welfare to Work Partnership

A Welfare to Work (WtW) Partnership, chaired by Eli Segal, was formed in 1997 to address two primary issues: the critical shortage of workers being faced by many businesses; and the movement of nearly four million individuals from the welfare system and public assistance to the "world of work" and self-sufficiency. Initially founded with five companies, the Partnership has expanded to thousands of companies with over 70 percent being small- to medium- sized firms. This WtW initiative has been highly successful at marketing the requirements and barriers of the WtW client population and engaging corporate and private sector support to expand employment opportunities. The Committee believes that a similar Private Sector Hiring Initiative would be equally successful in improving awareness of the added value people with disabilities can bring to these companies while greatly expanding job opportunities. This could be accomplished by expanding upon the President's Committee on Employment of Adults with Disabilities' Business Leadership Network, which includes a number of major corporate entities that have demonstrated strong support of hiring of people with disabilities and State level networks involving the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. It is particularly important to undertake this initiative while the economy is still robust and companies are experiencing significant shortages of skilled personnel.

The Committee also believes that the current WtW Partnership would benefit from a greater focus on some of the hidden disabilities commonly represented in the WtW population so that hiring practices and training can be geared to address these issues. Although considered successful for the overall welfare population, the Committee was unable to secure data on the numbers of

individuals with disabilities served through the Partnership.

Recommendations

1. Have a dialogue initiated by the President with private industry that will culminate in the development of a private sector Partnership focusing its efforts on the employment of individuals with disabilities.

2. The Committee would attempt to work with the existing Partnership, if possible, to secure their participation in the Presidential initiative.

3. The President could offer a public challenge to the Private sector to hire 10,000 individuals with disabilities every year for 5 years.

4. The existing WtW partnership should be encouraged to focus effort on the employment of individuals with disabilities, in addition to families on TANF who have children with disabilities

Technology

Issue: Section 508 Coordination

Most, if not all, Federal agencies have utilized specialized Y2K staff to test and change all agency software and to coordinate with numerous programs and projects to accomplish this cross-cutting task. Some of these same skills will be required to successfully implement the Section 508 standards. In addition, many Federal agencies have a Chief Information Officer (CIO). Finally, in addition to the technology accessibility provisions in Section 508, the Rehabilitation Act requires that Federal employers provide reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities. Both of these efforts may be best pursued in tandem.

Recommendations

1. Federal agencies would strongly consider using their Y2K project managers and staff for Section 508 compliance after January 2000.

2. The Chief Information Officer should establish an assistive technology program within the CIO organization specifically to address electronic and information technology access issues and standards. Such a program would serve to ensure that the agency is fully compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

3. Develop a Federal agency assistive technology program in such a manner as to ensure that all employees with disabilities receive appropriate technology-related accommodations, including needs assessments, integration of assistive technology with mainstream systems, and prompt service and maintenance.

4. DOL/ETA has funded a joint project with Minnesota VR to implement remote interpreting services in several One-Stop Career Centers to ensure the availability of interpreting services for deaf or hearing impaired individuals. Such remote video interpreting capabilities make qualified interpreters available quickly and are particularly advantageous in rural areas where qualified interpreters are not necessarily available.

Issue: Training and Technical Assistance

There is a great deal of Federal agency training — those hosted by agencies and others by contractors — that use technology, and the accessibility of these activities for employees with disabilities is an issue of concern. Finally, the President's Task Force on Federal Training Technology is examining technology-related training for Federal employees, including the use of Individual Training Accounts (ITAs).

Recommendations

1. Design Federal agency training programs that use technology (e.g., distance learning and web-based tutorials) and deliver them in a manner that is accessible to people with disabilities.

2. All end user support functions in Federal agencies (e.g., computer help desks and installation and support functions) should incorporate expertise with technology access and assistive technology, and provide (or obtain) specialized services adequate to ensure that end users with disabilities receive all necessary training and sup-

port to fully utilize electronic and information technology, including assistive or specialized technology. This may include, but is not limited to, use of computers, software, hardware, web sites, e-mail, e-commerce, and telephone systems.

3. All contracting/procurement training and certification programs within Federal agencies, and those whose curriculum is determined by the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) Council, if any, should incorporate Section 508 and technology access concepts into their curricula. The USDA Graduate School and other Federal contracting/procurement training programs also should include technology access. Finally, the Federal Acquisition Institute and the Defense Acquisition University should include information on technology access in their courses, including information on how to apply the upcoming Section 508 technology accessibility standards in the FAR.

4. If ITAs are established, the Subcommittee recommends that the cost of interpreters, readers, and/or auxiliary aids and services required by employees with disabilities be added to the Individual Training Accounts and come from a central fund to avoid potentially prohibitive stress on local budgets.

5. The Access Committee should pursue expanded implementation and piloting of remote interpreting technologies for the deaf and hearing impaired in more States and local One-Stop Career Centers through leveraging of agency resources available under NIDRR, RSA and DOL to support such technologies.

Issue: Public Programs and Services

Many Federal agencies use a variety of technologies to promote their agency's programs and services. Accessibility of these various technologies should be encouraged.

Recommendations

1. All Federal agency web sites must be fully accessible to people with disabilities, and comply with Section 508 standards. Agencies that use

Portable Document Format (PDF) files on their web sites to provide documents to the public would also provide text versions of these documents as they are not accessible to blind individuals using screen readers.

2. Federal agencies that solicit and/or receive public comment over the Internet or via their web sites also would ensure that these means of interacting with the public are fully accessible to people with disabilities. Agencies should use an accessibility utility (e.g., Bobby) to check their web sites and correct any access problems.

3. Federal agencies that use computer kiosks or similar means of sharing information with the public would ensure that the kiosks and the information contained within them are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Issue: The Digital Divide

The Committee is concerned that all information technologies be widely accessible and available to individuals with disabilities.

Recommendation

1. The Committee will explore the feasibility of developing an Executive Order to promote technology access in Federal agencies, and to suggest specific strategies that will help agencies comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. The Executive Order might include appropriate definitions of "acquisition" and "electronic and information technology" and should establish and fund technical assistance functions in one specific Federal agency to provide Section 508 guidance to all other agencies. Incorporating many of the Committee's recommendations, the Executive Order may direct agencies to do the following: establish assistive technology programs and support functions; ensure that procurement/contracting training and programs include information on the technology access requirements and the new Section 508 standards in the Federal Acquisition Regulations; make technology-based training and distance-learning programs accessible to people with disabilities; and ensure that their

web sites are compliant with Section 508, have the appropriate structure, and have all documents available in formats accessible to people with disabilities.

Issue: Leveraging Database Technologies

The Committee considers the leveraging and exploitation of database technologies to be a major tool for addressing employment barriers for people with disabilities and the multiple agencies that deliver program services. Several of the Committee agencies have, or would like to develop, database systems and Internet capabilities to list jobs, share resumes, or convey job accommodation information. SSA, ETA and the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities have been particularly interested in exploring ways to collaborate and leverage their respective systems.

Recommendations

1. ETA will be adding SSA and other Task Force members as subscribers to ALX Connects, the monthly electronic newsletter that describes new developments in ALX and America's Career Kit.

2. SSA's Project ABLE participants can be provided information to develop and post their resumes on America's Job Bank (AJB) using the online registration process. Project ABLE would be the contact point for employer inquiries, or SSA may get a copy of employer inquiries received by participants. Project ABLE may be added to the ALX-hosted specialty database, "Tools of the Trade." Project ABLE staff will review the AJB and ALX databases to identify other areas of possible coordination.

3. Following full implementation of One-Stop Consumer Reports System (CRS), SSA beneficiaries may be provided easy access so that they may utilize CRS-generated information on the performance histories of One-Stop training providers to enhance the quality of the Plan for Achieving Self-Sufficiency (PASS).

4. Recognizing the power/potential of O*NET, a work group of ETA and RSA staff has been

formed to ensure that people with disabilities get maximum benefit from the database. The focus is on enhancing the use of O*NET as a counseling tool to support delivery of services to people with disabilities, including developing a more user-friendly version of O*NET for rehabilitation professionals. The work group is also aware of the need to develop O*NET training programs for vocational rehabilitation staff and One-Stop counselors to enable staff to use the database appropriately and effectively to serve people with disabilities.

5. ETA and PCEPD staff are planning to connect O*NET information on ability and skill levels to information and resources on job accommodations (including PCEPD's Job Accommodation Network), that could be utilized to enable a person with a disability to perform the job.

6. ETA has made significant improvements to their disability on-line website at http://www.wdsc.org/disability/ and are in the process of developing a searchable directory of training, employment, rehabilitation, and other providers searchable by State and local area. ETA will be working closely with PCEPD to ensure tie-in with related efforts the Committee is pursuing. The foundation of the directory will potentially be built upon to address provider services relevant to other barriers to employment of people with disabilities and associated Federal agency programs.

Tax Policy

Issue: Tax Incentives

Working-age adults with disabilities often have a disincentive to work because of the high cost of personal attendant services and other services or technologies required for employment. Similarly, the cost to employers of hiring an individual requiring personal attendant services can be prohibitive. Tax credits and other incentives may provide a flexible way to assist people with disabilities and their employers in offsetting some of these expenses.

Recommendations

1. The Committee will review existing tax laws and policy and current tax legislation that has the potential to enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

2. The Committee will conduct a review of existing data and literature regarding the impact of tax policy on the ability of individuals with disabilities to become employed.

3. The Committee will review State and local tax credits and other work incentives to identify short- and long- term actions and recommendations. For example, research in this area has just begun, but it has already become clear that this is an area in which the Task Force could assist in disseminating information from the relatively small number of States (approximately 13) that have Statewide credits modeling the Federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit.

4. In collaboration with the Treasury/ Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Committee will develop a targeted outreach effort on tax credits and other work incentives. The effort will educate business and individuals with disabilities on provisions of the tax code.

5. The Treasury/IRS and the Task Force will develop tax related publications and link appropriate websites.

6. The Committee will review and assess information provided by the disability community, tax experts, and others.

7. The Committee will use its research to make recommendations for amendments to the existing code. These changes would be designed to encourage private sector employers to hire people with disabilities and promote and encourage people with disabilities to more advantageously enter the work force. This will include but will not be limited to: defining the idea, proposal, or objective; understanding what should be the magnitude of any tax benefit; reviewing the Earned Income tax credit; and identifying tax

options that will assist in paying for expenses related to work.

Lifelong Learning

Issue: Access

All relevant Federal agencies and programs should ensure that programs receiving Federal funding under educational or job training programs are truly physically and programmatically accessible to all persons with disabilities.

Recommendations

1. All the State plans under the WIA would include the State's self-evaluation for Americans with Disability Act (ADA) compliance and correction plans concerning State activities in employment and training and the State correction plan (Title I), as well as their adult education programs (Title II).

2. Similar requests should be made of States concerning their PRWORA efforts.

Issue: Training

Many skill acquisition programs conducted by the Federal government have demonstrated a limited understanding of disability issues and of ways to enhance skill development for people with disabilities.

Recommendations

1. Building on the expertise of Federally-Funded training programs in the disability field currently underway (e.g., workforce development, literacy, adult education) on disability issues. Some of the types of issues to cover include:

   • Disability awareness/definitions

   • Tools for screening and identification

   • Vocational Rehabilitation and other services

   • Effective educational approaches

   • Helping to build new services and infrastructure

- Issues of civil rights, accessibility, accommodations and assistive technology

2. A similar training program could be developed for consumers within these programs to help them become aware of options and resources as they become more choice conscious.

Issue: Collaboration

Interagency collaboration is critical to improving individuals with disabilities' access to lifelong learning.

Recommendations

1. The Subcommittee will investigate ways to increase collaborative efforts between agencies, such as agreeing on a standard definition of disability. Recognizing the ongoing confusion around Federal definitions of disability used in determining program eligibility, as well as definitions used for civil rights protection, Federal programs need to develop a manual on all disability programs and services, which should be made available for public access.

2. Conflicts in definitions of disability should be examined. Interagency collaboration would investigate strategies for developing one definition of disability that legislation and programs can build from.

3. The Subcommittee will focus on the issue of lifelong learning and data collection. Federal programs need to develop standardized methods of collecting data that incorporate all disability categories due to the ongoing confusion regarding rates of disabilities between the various Federal Programs. An emphasis should be placed on the collection of consistent and comparable data on all disability categories (from job training, adult education, welfare and other entitlement programs and vocational training programs) to support the development of a taxonomy of data to permit comparisons to be made between persons being served by these disability programs.

Issue: Investment

The Work Group recognizes a need for extensive new investment into the area of skill development for persons with disabilities. Again, there is a wide range of issues and concerns that need investment, some are in planning stages, others need to be moved from "pilot" status to an incorporated program. Some can be seen as small in scope and a rapid return in terms of impact, while other types of investments can be very costly and would take many years for the impact to be felt.

Recommendations

1. Develop two new national centers: a national training center on issues of disability and skill acquisition for adults with disabilities, (with the focus on training); and a National Research Rehabilitation Training Center on Lifelong Learning through OSERS/NIDRR.

2. Develop a wider and broader disability mission for OVAE to better support efforts of RSA, DOL, and SSA in enabling persons with disabilities to acquire basic skills needed to compete in the work place. Provide resources to these Federal agencies to expand the training of States in regard to disability issues.

3. Provide additional and expanded support to the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) to continue and expand their national training on disability and literacy issues and appropriate instructional approaches. Assist Direct Family Literacy, Even Start and Head Start programs to assist NIFL regarding training programs in reading research results.

4. Provide increased support for RSA to support college options for young adults with disabilities.

5. Provide resources to the National Council on Disability and the President's Committee on the Employment of Persons with Disability to develop a national consumer awareness training program for persons with disabilities in welfare and job training efforts, and to provide the

resource to conduct nationwide training in these programs.

6. Increase funding and take other steps to aggressively address the impact of school reform efforts, including new skills testing, on young adults with disabilities and their impact on life-long learning.

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Department of Labor

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Department of Education

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